

THE
HISTORY
OF THE
LIFE & DEATH

OF
THAT NOTED HIGHWAYMAN,

Mr. WILLIAM NEVISON.

CONTAINING,

His Birth, Parentage, and Education; the Occasion why he left England; what Tricks he played in Holland: his Valour in Flanders while a Soldier: the Robberies he committed after his Return to Britain; how he shot Mr. Fletcher, who attempted to take him Prisoner; and lastly, his Imprisonment, Trial & penitential Speech at Tyburn, near York, March 15th, 1684.

Oh Fletcher! on me lies the fatal Guilt.
Altho' my Safety made thy Blood be spilt.

NOTTINGHAM:

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THE
THE LIFE AND DEATH
OF
Mr. William Nevison.

C H A P I.

Of his birth, parentage, and education, and what happened to the youth, whilst he was under the tuition of a schoolmaster.

IN the year of our blessed Lord 1639, Nevison was born at Pontefract, a town in the West Riding of Yorkshire, famous for its antiquity. His parents had a sufficient estate to subsist on; and when their son was fit for a school they put him under a prudent master. He took his learning very fast till he attained to the age of 14 years, and then he became as much noted for his little tricks, as he had been before for his understanding. Robbing orchards, and leading his schoolfellows into great enormities brought him into higher crimes. He made bold with

with a silver spoon belonging to his father, which he sold to an old woman who dealt in apples, pears, &c. for the value of four shillings, which he was to take out in her ware. The young thief having fruit in plenty, his father asked of whom he had it? When being told, he then demanded of the woman how she got payment? who answered, Oh! very honestly, for that his son, young Master William, having luckily found a silver spoon, had sold it to her upon the condition aforesaid. The spoon being produced, plainly appeared to be stolen; for which he was not only severely whipt at home, but in school, by a judge and jury, composed of the scholars, in presence of the master, arraigned, convicted, and condemned to be hanged; unless he confessed all that he had done before; and so much was he affrighted when the rope was put round his neck, & tied to a beam, that he exhibited a catalogue of what fruits, fowls, and pigs, he had stolen from orchards, roosts, and flies; and to whom he disposed of them: How he trick'd an old woman, by putting three welps to her sow, instead of the like number of pigs, (by him privately nourished in a wood, till fit for sale) which made the people wonder at the strange production; how having robbed a garden, and being pursued by another ancient female, attended with her swift footed daughter, he gave the stolen fruit to an innocent lad, whom he met, by way of exchange for some silly trifle; which being taken on him, he was hurried

hurried away to school, where he underwent severe discipline, thro' Nevison's denial of the matter. Such tricks as these were the substance of the young thief's confession; who, being a little pinch'd with the rope, was released with this pittance: "That for an hour each school day, during a fortnight, he shall stand in the midst of the scholars with his breeches down, and receive three smart lashes with a rod, that so he might never do the like again."

C H A P. II.

How young Nevison was revenged of his schoolmaster, robbed his father, and took his course for London.

NOW it was, that the shame of what the young thief had suffered, with the terror of what he was yet to endure, lay so heavy upon his mind, that made him resolve to act what appeared more criminal. All that night he was forming projects, and when the sun was just appearing from East, the family being in a deep sleep, he got up, stole his father's closet door key out of his pocket, and took as much cash as came to about ten pounds. Now thought he I'll be revenged on my schoolmaster. Upon which taking a saddle and bridle, he goes where the pedagogue's horse was grazing, accoutres mounts and spurs him on for his journey. It was about two o'clock that the creature was deemed

deemed to be strayed, and dinner time before the youth was missed by his father. The next day Nevison got to Ware, [being met on the road by a Pontefract butcher, who brought the news home near which he parted from the tired beast, fearing a discovery, and so by moonlight travelled on foot to a farmer's house whose son, being bound next day for London, gave him a lift behind him; when soon changing his name and habit, he got into the service of a very rich brewer, whose compting-house he robbed of about 200*l.* while the drunken clerk lay snoring : with this sum, assuming the air of gentility, he made his escape into Holland.

C H A P. III.

Of his strange Behaviour there.

THE troubles in England gave Nevison d pretence why he sought protection in Rotterdam ; pretending he was driven from his possessions. In pity therefore he was entertained by a merchant, whose family, besides attendants consisted of his lady and two fair natural daughters. Soon after Nevison courted the eldest, but the merchants wife opened her amorous mind to our young but now perplexed adventurer, to obtain his loving embraces, who knew not well how to satisfy the desires of both young and old. His marriage with the former was suspended till they heard from England whether

he was the knight he pretended to be; whilst his more believing wife, upon the sharpers pretence of just hearing that Oliver had seized his estate, and the sum he had brought was almost exhausted, gave him 500l. with a promise of more when he had privately fulfilled her vile intentions. He took the money, but abhorred her levity; and knowing the young lady's desires to be more honourable, he prevailed with her to take her riches and jewels, move with him in the night to another province, and there promised to marry her, which was accordingly performed to the merchant's surprize, and vexation of his justly disappointed poor lady. But during these transactions, the brewer's clerk who had fled from London, and was upon the search after Nevilson) happened to espy him, and privately made complaint: Those wise magistrates not taking cognizance of crimes done in other kingdoms, he took a different course, whilst Nevilson knew not of his doings, by affrighting him with punishment, if he gave not sudden satisfaction. Upon this the spark deposited 20l. took a release of 200l. as money lent (not stolen; forsooth) at London, for which he gave him a bill on his wife's brother at Amsterdam where no such person was in being. Thus the poor clerk was again imposed on, except in getting 20l. For while he was joyfully trotting forward, the merchant, who had heard where the new married couple were, had Nevilson secured, their effects seized, and sent home his daughter

daughter, who soon after died with grief. In this sad condition Nevison and another Englishman, to escape justice, broke from goal; and by a surprizing escape, got upon the tops of houses, to down the chimney, and out of doors thro' the fright of the inhabitants. After which they travelled into Flanders, and listed amongst English volunteers in the Spanish service. Here Nevison behaved valiantly till he was discharged and arrived in England just when the Protector was departed out of the world.

C H A P. IV.

How Nevison equipp'd himself for a robber,
and of his bold transaction.

SOME sparks of grace now seemed to enlighten his mind, with a resolution to return to his father, and become a new creature but the enemy of happiness prevailed against that odious disposition. By some means he procured a horse, pistols, &c. to go upon the road, which he did alone, and often to his satisfaction.

One time he met two countrymen, who told him the ways with thieves, that had just taken from them 40l. He asked them what they would give to him who should procure the money again? They telling him innocently, they would rather lose their stock than any should be hurt for it,

especially he, who so generously intimated
 himself the adventurous person, it so in-
 spired his gallant heart, that he gave them
 directions to follow him. That when he
 had attacked the rogues, they should
 descend the hill, and come to his assist-
 ance. Upon this he rode to the highway-
 men; and spoke to one of them, saying,
 that as he had borrowed 40l. of his friend,
 who had ordered him to receive it, so if he
 refused to refund, he'd certainly engage
 them sword and pistol. While this dispute
 lasted, the countrymen appeared as direct-
 ed, the two other highwayman rode off,
 though the thief looked at them, requir-
 ing assistance. Upon which he yielded,
 and was obliged to deliver the money he
 had, the others having rode away with the
 rest. Nevison delivered him to the custo-
 dy of the countrymen, and mounted the
 highwayman's horse after the others, re-
 quiring ransom for their partners life. On
 which one of them fired, but missing Ne-
 vison disabled him by a pistol shot, and the
 other called for mercy. He then took
 from them 100l. rode back, and gave the
 countrymen their money again; who when
 the captive thief was set at liberty, invited
 their

their champion to an inn, where, Nevison after a good supper, beginning a discourse of himself, who went by the name of Johnson, received a pleasant account from the landlord what a generous spark he had been, in robbing an old sequestrator of what he had only wronged many of, by taking him from amongst ladies in a stage coach, carrying him on the postilion's horse into a wood, and making him give a bill of 500l. which was paid before the miser could prevent by writing to London: Not only so, but obliged him to confess his numerous sins, especially what related to the injured widows and orphans. This true story made Nevison usher in another of himself tho' under the said name of Johnson: how an ensnaring woman once exceeded him in cunning, whom he had overtaken going to Stevenage, to which place he hoped she'd be pleased to accept of him as her guardian, and solicited that she would go with him to his inn. That there he owned her as his wife, had a costly supper provided, prevailed for a nights lodging, since they had amused the host and landlady in being married; that he would lie very innocently in bed without hurting

hurting her precious virginity, and so forth. In short, Johnson got drunk, the jilt and landlady still ply'd him with more wine, he enjoyed his delicious mistress, and it was early in the morning before he fell a sleep. The lady taking this opportunity, stole from his side, goes down stairs, call'd for her pretended husband's portmanteau to take out some clean linen, robs it of about 250l. in gold, gets her side saddle put upon his horse, pretending to visit a lady four miles off, before he was stirring, and so departing, was no more heard of there. Johnson awaking about eleven o'clock, and discoursing with the landlady concluded he was bitten; but took no notice, had her galloway saddled, pretending to come again, in which he was prevented, because she had not left him sufficient money to pay their expences.

Thus ended the story with laughter, the night called them to repose; and in the morning they cautiously parted.

C H A P. V.

Of his Return to his Father.

MR. Nevison, in his present discourse at his late inn, thought fit to conceal a trick he had served a trooper, just after

after his lady had bilk'd him ; for while in vexation he was riding her palfrey, the warrior overtook him, when falling into discourse about the goodness of horses, the foldier laughed at Nevison for the meanness of his ; who, mettled said, he would travel with him on it for 100l. a day ; or if he pleased would leap over an high gate. The latter was agreed to; on lessening the wager to five guineas. The trooper tried, but the horse would not attempt it ; this made Nevison tell him, that if he would dissolve the wager, he would force his horse to perform it, or would double the same. The trooper dismounting, up gets Nevison; when clapping a seasonable spur, he immediately whipt over, and rode quite away upon the old trade of robbing, leaving the poor trooper to bestride the lady's palfrey.

About the year 1661, having robbed a rich grazier of 500l. resolved to see his native place, and be reconciled to his parents. Imagining himself to be out of remembrance, he rode to Pontefract, enquired at an inn about their health, and sent for his father. The old gentlemen did not know him, but upon Nevison's asking

asking several questions, told him, he once had a graceless son, whom he supposed to have been dead long since. Upon this Nevison telling him he had seen the young man in a foreign country, and had heard of several of his childish pranks from his own mouth, he convinced the old man that he was living, but would not say any more till he had obtained his full pardon, which the tender parent granting, Nevison fell at his feet and discovered himself.

This was sufficient joy, all the neighbours were invited; the schoolmaster (who had received satisfaction from his father for his horse) came amongst the rest: Nevison told his father by good fortune he had saved good and soon after, by making friends he got into an exciseman's place.

Whilst he lodged at his father's, a malster happening one day to be there at dinner, was telling how Johnson once set upon him, but through force of an oaken cudgel, he brought the hero on his knees, notwithstanding his sword and pistol. This taunting false story nettled young Nevison exceedingly, yet he mildly seemed to blame the malster for not taking him prisoner; who returned this scornful answer, that

that it was below him, sure he did not take him for a thief catcher ; No said Nevison, I beg your pardon, but I also experienced his courage, who after some contest disarmed me ; yet being pleased with my stout resistance, he had me to an inn, treated me, professed future kindness, told me how to direct a letter to him, and gave me an account of all his actions on the road, except this you have mentioned. O, quoth the malster, do you think he would discover what tended to his dishonour ? I wish I could see him, tho' it cost me 10l. that I might make him confess what I have said, to your face. Nevison told him, if he'd make it 50l. he'd engage to forfeit twice the sum if he did not meet him, for he'd write on purpose. In short the wager was laid, and the place fixed between Pontefract and Ferrybridge. At the time appointed, Nevison disguised himself like a gentleman, waited and saw the malster, who little expected it. He gave him the choice of weapons, but the boaster's heart failing, he confessed his error, returned home, and was sufficiently laughed by his neighbours.

CHA

C H A P. VI.

Of Nevifon's re-infesting the Road:

A little time after this, death summon'd his father to another world; when for want of paternal admonition, Nevifon returning to his old courses, grew noted, by obliging the carriers to become tributary for their safety, robbed rich persons, and generously gave to the poor.

One day, dining with a Yorkshire gentleman, who, after telling him that he had 1000*l* to pay at London, asked him what way he thought best to send it? Nevifon advised him by his trusty valiant servants, about ten in number. They were accordingly armed with swords and pistols. Nevifon then disguised himself, and with another who attended him, follow'd these men to an inn; bribed the ostler next morning to put the horse on the breech which carried the money, and attack'd them at the first private place; where the cowardly fellows suffered Nevifon and his man to move off with the booty, which they carried directly to London, and paid it according to the written directions. The servants to hide their shame, shot a horse or two, made bullets fly thro' their coats and hats, gave themselves

themselves a few slight wounds, and returning to their master, related a formal story after a very doleful manner. The innocent gentleman gave credit to their report, and was in the greatest distress; till one day Mr. Nevison, after his return, came to him, asked what news from London? to whom he mournfully told his condition Nevison not seeming to believe what the servants reported, desired they might be called. Up came the butler among the rest with his wound, affirming the sad blows they got by their resistance. At which Nevison laughing, declaring, that it was he who robbed the lying wretches, & as a proof produced the acquittances, and told all the circumstances of the action. No words can express the joy of the gentleman, and the wretches were obliged to ask pardon, pay for the horses they kill'd and lose their places in disgrace.

But Mr. Nevison having afterwards made bold with the purses of three eminent persons, they had him watch'd narrowly, secured whilst he was asleep, and committed to Leicester goal. He was kept in irons, till a few friends were procured, with a brib'd physician, to declare
that

that he was ill of the pestilence; when his bolts being knock'd off, and a new lodging prepared with a nurse to attend him; further report was made, that not only his life was in great danger, but that of every person who should approach him. The goaler's wife would not suffer her husband to come to him, or the turnkeys to approach the chamber. This gave his friends an opportunity to usher in a disguised painter who perspater'd his breast, hands and face with blue spots, like one infected: within an hour after 'twas given out that he was dead. In short, he was carried off in a coffin, from which he arose to pursue his old trade; and then being filled, as though a corpse lay enclosed, was soon covered in the grave.

Upon his new appearance to collect the usual contributions paid him formerly by coachmen, carriers, &c. a rumour was spread, that his ghost was become as troublesome to the world as his living person had been. but it being proved that he was still alive, the Leicester goaler was discharged, and a considerable reward offered to such who should take him either alive or dead. However, none for a time dared to attack him.

At length Mr. Nevison got into the acquaintance of Edward Bracey, a notorious highwayman: Soon did they recount their separate adventures, and when Nevison related the story of being cheated at the inn by a most artful lady, Bracey smiling said, he knew her very well, having served him for a wife 10 Years assisted him in all his enterprizes, & had informed him of that comical joke.

Hereupon he conducted Nevison to their lodging that night, when the lady did not know him, till he begun to accuse her for too great severity, in thus serving a brother of the road; who replied, he should have told her so: Tho, added she, if you had even discovered yourself, I should been more proud of deceiving the ingenious Mr. Nevison, than any person living. In such rallery they proceeded, till the jilt who had inveigled a young gentleman of 100l. a year told them how she designed they should trick him out of it; first to get him drunk; next to persuade him to a robbery; that their man Dick should be dressed like a gentleman, with 300l. in his pocket whom the cully was to bid stand, and being taken, obliged to part with his estate to save his neck. Her advice was taken, the spark attacked the supposed gentleman, and was obliged to pay 2000l. for fear of imaginary prosecution.

However

ever, tho' they got so much wealth. is did not alter their course of life. Bracey's wife was overtaken by death, near Sherwood for st. Thither came Bracey to attend her funeral, tho, an old woman foretold, he should die there in a week. Accordingly, being feeding his mare with mutton, some countrymen shot him dead.

CHAP. VI.

Of what things happened afterwards to Nevison: with his apprehension, commitment to York Castle, and last dying words.

NEVISON was much concerned at the catastrophe of his friend. A little time after being at an inn along with new companions, he was perceived by some persons whom he robbed. About 14 armed men were just ascending the stairs, whom he espy'd. The rapster just coming up, he takes from the fellow his apron; throws off his coat, hat, &c. gets a fowl pipe, with an empty pot, crying coming Sir! Thus array'd he makes to the stable, mounts his horse, and rides away. He shifted his habitation to a house where he was known and coming into Yorkshire, met a Knight's servant belonging to that county, who taking him for an honest gentleman, freed

told him, 'That he was entrusted with
 200l. but he had orders to avoid that
 rogue Nevison at much as possible.' This
 set Nevison a smiling, who accompanied
 him to the knight's lodgings, openly de-
 claring to the fellow, that he was the same
 Nevison, and should be glad to drink a
 bottle with his master at the inn.' The men
 did so: the gentleman came accordingly,
 and promised, that if ever it lay in his pow-
 er to serve him, he would not fail therein,
 but exert himself to save him.

And indeed now his fate began to appear,
 he was soon after apprehended, tried, and
 received sentence of death, but thro' the
 said Knight's intercession, a reprieve was
 obtain'd with an order for transportation.
 Before the ship was fit to sail, he got off
 his irons, mounted the walls and made a
 surprizing escape; when prosecuting his
 old trade, a reward was set upon his head.
 Several in vain laid wait for him: But two
 brothers of the name of Fletcher, were the
 most assiduous. One of whom overtaking
 him, Nevison made him sensible, that he
 had a suspicion he came to secure him.
 But the man being terrified, answered,
 'he had no such design.' 'Tis well if it be

so, said Nevison: But I mistrust you so far, that I either require your life immediately or that of your horse, which might enable you to pursue after mine. Fletcher consenting to the latter, Nevison shot the poor creature dead on the spot and rode away.

Some time after the other brother ventured to attack the courageous Nevison, who scorning to submit to his opposer, sent a brace of bullets thro' his head.

On Friday the 1st of March, 1684, Capt. Hardcastle, a stout gentleman, riding to Wakefield, happen'd to call at Throp, and as he was drinking a glass with his friends, a countryman coming by, declared, 'that at a public house in the village he had just seen Nevison. The Captain sending privately for constables with an assistant armed with pistols, they suddenly seized upon him, and, after some resistance, made him submit. To them and the Justice he said his name was Johnson but not being regarded, he was led towards York Castle. Before he arrived at Swillington he confessed who he really was, and at an ale-house there he deposited 5s in the hands of a gentleman his give to wife, desiring that she might send him clean linen, with other decent necessaries.

At the assizes the country people came in numbers to see this extraordinary person to the great plague as well as profit of the goalor. Being brought before the judge, here was little occasion to promote a fresh indictment, but rather to confirm the former sentence, since he had not submitted to his former transportation. He pleaded, that he was to serve the King in Tangier, as an ensign to one of the foot companies, had not sickness prevented. But this excuse being thought insufficient, he was ordered for execution, tho' he very much insisted on a reprieve till next assizes, and was favored by the solicitation of several great persons.

It was on the 15th of March, that being decently habited, he was led to Tyburn near York; where, after necessary prayers, with the singing of a penitential psalm, he mounted the ladder, and had the instrument of death fix'd close round his neck, in this miserable condition, which drew tears from the eyes of some tender hearted spectators, he appeared with a serene countenance, and uttered the following speech:

GOOD

GOOD PEOPLE,

I Now freely confess to you all, that for my sins and enormities, the judgment of God, the law of the kingdom, and the equity of my sentence, have brought me here to suffer condign punishment. I forgive all the world, as I hope those whom I have injured will forgive me. Alas! not all the wealth I took from them ever afforded me the least true content of mind. As King David says, There is no peace with the wicked; so a robber is continually restless, whether riding, walking, eating, waking or sleeping. Frightful dreams disturb him, daily crimes fill up the measure of his iniquities, till at length he finds himself involved in despair. But the greatest crime that troubles me, which upon my panting heart seems to lie like a ponderous mountain of lead is the fatal death of Mr. Fletcher, because I never murdered any person before; and I now wish he had rather taken my life, than I his, tho' it was even in my own defence: I hope that my ignominious death will strike terror into wicked persons, as well those who hear my fate, as those who see me die. Disobedience to parents, con-
tempt

empt of superiors, and neglect of the Lord's day, led me insensibly into sad temptations. My gallantry in giving to the poor I know has been applauded; but yet can no ways excuse my taking from the rich; who, tho' they enjoy great store of wealth, have equal care to balance their felicity. I am willing to leave this transitory stage; I depart praying for you all, desiring your prayers, as you behold me expiring, that my departing soul may be washed in the purest streams proceeding from the eternal foundation of mercy. Come, Lord Jesus! receive my sorrowful spirit. In thee I trust; let me not, in my last moments, be confounded.

Mr. Nevison, having thus almost finished his devotions, pulled the cap over his face; and using several fervent ejaculations, in a small space afterwards gave the executioner a sigh to perform his office; who, accordingly turned him off the ladder, when a few minutes wasted his fleeting soul to the boundless ocean of eternity.

After his body had hung the time appointed it was cut down, put into a coffin, and decently interred in a church yard belonging to the city; being attended to the
grave

grave by many people, who could have wished a man of such parts as he was, had applied them to a better purpose.

This was the end of the remarkable Mr. Nevison, who was a person of quick understanding, tall in stature, every way proportionable, exceeding valiant, having also the air and carriage of a gentleman. But what are these accomplishments if grace be wanting? May all persons who read this book, learn to abhor his enormities; strive to obtain the blessings of Almighty God; wrong nobody, but rather labour for themselves, and to satisfy the necessities of others; that so at the last day, both their souls and bodies may appear unblemished before the great judge of heaven and earth, who will reward them for past troubles, and wipe away all tears from their eyes. To which be ascribed all honour and glory, both now and ever. Amen.

THE END.

